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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 003876

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SUBJECT: ISLAMISTS WIN ANOTHER BATTLE: RAMADAN TV SPECIAL

BANNED BY MINISTER OF INFORMATION

REF: A. KUWAIT 1701

[B.](#) 03 KUWAIT 4503

Classified By: DCM Matthew H. Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary and Comment: The recently banned Ramadan television special 'Donia Al-Quwy' has become a nationwide hit for the very reasons it is not being aired by local stations: its focus on taboo societal issues. While the ban reflects the growing influence of Kuwaiti Islamists in this conservative Gulf society, the popularity of the show highlights the country's struggle between its Islamic identity and modern ambitions. End Summary and Comment.

12. (U) Kuwait, a country in which women can drive, stroll unveiled and write columns critical of the government, prides itself on its openness in comparison to its Gulf neighbors. Yet, Kuwaitis hoping to catch a glimpse of the top-rated Ramadan TV special this year better have satellite television. 'Donia Al-Quwy' (which translates roughly as "The World of the Strong"), a program which was written, filmed and produced in Kuwait, was picked up by other Gulf television stations but is not being broadcast in Kuwait.

Ramadan Special Airs Kuwait's Dirty Laundry

13. (SBU) Information Minister Mohammed Abulhasan, under fire from Kuwaiti Islamists for most of his term, deemed the show inappropriate for Kuwaiti audiences and prohibited local Kuwaiti stations from buying its broadcast rights. The reasons? The show portrays mixed-gender parties; forced, arranged marriages; adultery and other so-called taboo acts that the GOK and many Kuwaitis insist do not occur in this traditional muslim society.

14. (C) This hasn't stopped Kuwaiti audiences from tuning in to satellite channels on a nightly basis to catch the latest episode. In fact, an informal survey of Pol contacts and FSN's reveals that the show is by far the most popular of the annual Ramadan TV specials, in large part because it addresses issues currently being grappled with in Kuwaiti society. (Note: Poloff has attended numerous mixed-gender parties in Kuwait; additionally, forced arranged marriages are prevalent and the practice of adultery by both sexes is widely believed to occur and is sometimes reported by the press. End Note.)

Tradition Vs. Modernization at Home and on TV

15. (C) The cultural conflict over 'Donia al-Quwy' reveals the sometimes contradictory nature of Kuwaiti society. Poloff recently attended an Iftar (or futoor, in local dialect) meal to break the fast at the home of a middle class Kuwaiti family, where the show was discussed. A woman in full hijab, who frequently argues for increased women's rights, noted she agreed with the Information Minister's decision to ban the show, but admitted she had seen it. Her brother, a westernized Kuwaiti educated in Indiana, said he disagreed with the decision, but added that, "of course, these things don't actually happen in Kuwait."

16. (SBU) The banning of the show is the latest in a long string of successes that Islamist societal elements have had in curbing cultural influences they deem harmful or out of line with the teachings of Islam. In October, threats and protests from Islamist MP's forced the cancellation of Kuwaiti auditions for the Lebanese-produced hit Arab television show, 'Star Academy.' These threats followed October 2003 and May demonstrations against a concert by 'Star Academy' participants (reftels) and frequent Islamist denunciations of the show as, in the words of Islamist MP Waleed Tabatabaie, "aiming to destroy young people." In addition, Kuwait National Cinema Company (KNCC) was obliged to close its theatres for the last ten days of Ramadan this year, supposedly to allow Kuwaitis to reflect on their faith.

Local dailies have since reported that the sale of pirated DVDs has doubled since the closures. Finally, responding to pressure from the government and reportedly some Islamists, the producer of a social comedy play in November changed its title from "Kuwaiti in Fallujah" to "Love in Fallujah." Several Kuwaiti Islamist activists have in recent months

traveled to Fallujah and taken part in fighting against U.S. and coalition forces.

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